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THE SINO-SOVIET MILITARY RAPPROCHEMENT

BY

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THE SINO-SOVIET MILITARY RAPPROCHEMENT
AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

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This paper traces the development of the Sino-Soviet military rapprochement from its beginnings in December 1988 to the present. A brief survey of the turbulent relationship between the two countries is presented as background, followed by the strategic and economic rationale behind endeavors to normalize relations. Visits by senior officers, potential arms sales, troop reductions, and efforts to institute confidence building measures along the border are cited as evidence of growing military ties. The paper closes by highlighting implications for the United States and concludes that the military rapprochement will continue.

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While Leonid Brezhnev favored an expansionist, confrontational foreign policy, Mikhail Gorbachev, prompted by failures of Soviet sponsored national liberation movements and the burden of Afghanistan, recognized the lack of utility of this approach. These excursions only exacerbated world-wide apprehension, and resulted in a military competition with the West which the Soviets could not sustain without wrecking their economy. He realized he needed to pursue a foreign policy that was no longer threatening, or perceived as such, in order to gain "breathing space" to restructure his economic system. Initially, he appeared to key on the United States and the Western Alliance, announcing unilateral force reductions and articulating his willingness to proceed with additional arms control measures. Concurrently, though, he made overtures to the People's Republic of China.

In this regard, it was somewhat ironic that as Gorbachev's sway in Eastern Europe waned with the collapse of client state communist governments, Soviet maneuverings in the Far East, targeted towards China, were on the upswing. While feelers have been extended on a variety of fronts, one facet which has no counterpart in the West is the evolving military rapprochement between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the People's Republic of China (PRC). This burgeoning relationship, which is gaining momentum, has significant strategic implications for the United States.

Prior to examining this rapprochement and its compelling rationale, it is appropriate to review the historical underpinnings

of the Sino-Soviet relationship. Following the Chinese Communist overthrow of Chiang Kai-Shek in 1949, the Soviets concluded a treaty in 1950 with Mao Zedong entailing territorial concessions, economic credits, and creation of a military alliance. The treaty was subsequently followed by additional trade and economic agreements by which China supplied raw materials and the Soviets provided machinery, arms, and technical advisors.¹

The alliance flourished during the early years, but the Chinese began to chafe under Moscow's perceived domination. Ideological dissention followed despite expressions of solidarity at the 40th anniversary celebration of the October Revolution in 1957. Moscow's seeming impartiality during the Sino-Indian border troubles of 1959-60, its refusal to assist the Chinese in regaining Taiwan, and erratic support for the Chinese nuclear program only exacerbated the situation.² As tensions mounted, in the summer of 1960 Nikita Khrushchev withdrew all Soviet advisors from China leaving numerous projects only partially completed.

The rift was now open knowledge as both parties vied for leadership of the world revolutionary movement, and attacks on Mao by Khrushchev and vice-versa became increasingly personal.³ An effort by high level party officials of both countries in 1963 to mediate the dispute failed as did attempted discussions in 1965 under Khrushchev's successor, Leonid Brezhnev.⁴ No improvement in relations was discernible as the 1960s drew to a close. To the contrary, the situation worsened as skirmishes erupted on the border approximately three hundred miles from the city of

Khabarovsk.

Khabarovsk itself is in the area of one of several disputes along the 4,150 mile Sino-Soviet border. Contested territory includes more than six hundred islands on the Chinese side of the main channel of the Ussuri, Amur, and Argun rivers, the Manzhouli region in the eastern juncture of the Chinese-Soviet-Mongolian border, and 20,000 square kilometers in the Pamir mountains where Tajikistan, Sinkiang Province, and part of Afghanistan meet.⁵ The sole island of any strategic significance is Heixiazi, located at the confluence of the Amur and Ussuri rivers, due to its proximity to Khabarovsk. That city, inhabited by 600,000 people, is headquarters for the Soviet Far Eastern Military District, has one of the longest runways in Siberia, contains the Amur river crossing point for the vital Soviet link to the west -- the Trans Siberian railroad, and is within artillery range from Heixiazi.⁶ In 1967, in recognition of the city's importance, the Soviets imposed a ten year blockade at the west end of Heixiazi against Chinese shipping on the Amur.⁷

The border clashes occurred on Zhenbao (Damansky) Island, upstream from Heixiazi and Khabarovsk. "Skirmishes in this area had been going on since 1959, and each side had cited thousands of violations by the other."⁸ On March 2, 1969, Chinese troops opened fire on a Soviet unit, inflicting moderate casualties. On 15 March, the Chinese attacked a second time, but were decisively defeated by an alerted and ready Soviet force.

Although the Bulgarian Foreign Minister stated in April that "it was conceivable that Warsaw Pact forces might intervene in a case where incidents on the Sino-Soviet frontier 'would menace the security of the Socialist camp,'" minor skirmishes and joint accusations of border violations continued. The crisis abated after the Soviets hinted they were prepared to employ nuclear weapons if the conflict escalated, and the Chinese, in October, 1969, acknowledged that the border disputes were not a reason for war.⁹

While the shooting had stopped mistrust had not. Moscow had begun increasing its military forces in the Far East prior to Zhenbao Island, but subsequent to that action, intensified its build-up. Whereas twenty-one divisions were stationed in the Far East in 1969, there were thirty in 1970 and forty-five in 1980.¹⁰ Corresponding increases in the Soviet Pacific Fleet based in Vladivostok and in aircraft were evident as well. Tensions were rekindled in 1971 when Secretary of State Henry Kissinger initiated diplomatic contact with China. "This completely new variable, a stunning turnabout, fueled Soviet paranoia over possible U.S.-Chinese collusion against the USSR."¹¹ It also provided an open channel of sorts for China, frustrating Moscow's efforts to contain Beijing through a systematic program of courting countries bordering its adversary.

Relations through the 1970s remained relatively unchanged despite the death of Mao, with Moscow continuing its attempts to isolate China while occasionally extending tentative feelers. The military build-up, highlighted by the deployment in 1977 of SS-20

intermediate range nuclear missiles, proceeded, partly as a response to the perceived United States-China linkage. Competition for influence in the Third World continued, although Moscow generally prevailed. The blockade of the Amur river was quietly lifted in 1977, and in September, 1979, meetings were conducted in Moscow to find common ground for precepts to replace the 1950 Sino-Soviet treaty then due to expire in 1980.¹² However, the Soviet-Vietnamese Agreement in 1978, the Chinese attack on Vietnam in February, 1979, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December, 1979, served to heighten concerns once again.¹³

In an effort to achieve some sort of reconciliation, Sino-Soviet consultations between special envoys on normalizing relations occurred from 1982-1984, achieving limited progress in matters involving border trading points and economic exchange. Favorable signals were evident in 1984 when Vice Premier Wan Li attended General Secretary Andropov's funeral, the Foreign Ministers of the two countries met at the United Nations in September, and first deputy chairman of the Presidium of the USSR Council of Ministers, Ivan Arkhipov, visited China in December.¹⁴ Further improvement in relations essentially stalled on what Beijing referred to as the "three major obstacles": withdrawal of Soviet troops from the Sino-Soviet border and Mongolia, withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan, and the cessation of Soviet support for Vietnamese aggression in Cambodia.

In July, 1986, Mikhail Gorbachev, who in March of the previous year had expressed his desire for improved relations, broke the

impasse during a speech in Vladivostok in which he promised to withdraw six regiments from Afghanistan and remove a substantial number of the estimated 60,000-70,000 troops in Outer Mongolia. He also conceded that the navigational channel of the Amur-Ussuri river could be utilized as the border between China and the USSR, as opposed to the previous position that the Chinese shoreline was the demarcation line. Additional overtures, applicable to both China and other nations with an interest in the Pacific, were proposed as well to include a reduction of naval vessels, nuclear non-proliferation measures, and an offer to reduce the levels of armed forces in the region. This extended the concept of "reasonable sufficiency" first noted in connection with Western nations to Asia.¹⁵ The speech was the culmination of Gorbachev's efforts to revitalize ties with China that he first articulated in May, 1985, saying, "The USSR would like a serious improvement in relations with the PRC and considers that, given reciprocity, this is fully possible."¹⁶

What compelled Gorbachev to pursue this endeavor, to make significant concessions not only regarding the "three obstacles" but the highly contentious border issue as well? Likewise, why was China so receptive, rather than simply rebuffing the gesture as it had previous advances by Gorbachev's predecessors? In essence, the goals of the two countries had evolved to the point where the respective national interests and strategic concerns clearly warranted some sort of normalized relations.

The Soviets see themselves as an Asian and a Pacific power. Twenty percent of the citizens of the USSR are of Asian nationality and one-third of its territory is east of Irkutsk, isolated from the primary population and industrial centers of the country. The USSR strongly desires to participate in the economic growth of the Pacific Rim, but realizes that its formidable military presence in the area has been threatening, not only to China, but to other regional nations. Given this atmosphere, Moscow recognizes that economic agreements and further penetration of the area's markets will be extremely difficult to attain unless the Soviet Union is perceived as less menacing, a goal that can be achieved through decreased levels of armed forces in the area.

This argument for troop reductions is offset by the relative geographic isolation of the Soviet Far East from the remainder of the USSR, a very real positional disadvantage from the perspective of Soviet planners. Both Khabarovsk (Headquarters, Far Eastern Military District) and Vladivostok (Headquarters, Pacific Fleet) are within fifty miles of the Chinese border, and the Trans-Siberian railroad, the major Soviet supply link to the west, is readily susceptible to Chinese interdiction. The territory itself is valuable due to its abundance of natural resources such as oil, natural gas, and coal. To the Soviet military, the border represents "a thin line between a growing, heavily-populated geopolitical rival to the south and a sparsely populated, mineral rich expanse of the Soviet empire far from the heart of the homeland."¹⁷

Paradoxically, the robust levels of armed forces needed as a hedge against China precluded the USSR's acceptance in the region as an economic player. If the Chinese threat was tempered, however, Soviet troop strength could be safely reduced and the economic rewards would follow. Gorbachev appreciated this and understood relatively early that the military build-up was not the answer, asserting in February, 1986, "The character of present weapons does not leave a single state with the hope of defending itself only by military-technical means...The guaranteeing of security ever more appears as a political problem and it can be resolved only by political means."¹⁸

Another facet of national security also drove the Soviets. Although unlikely, if hostilities were to erupt in Europe, the Soviets did not want to confront the strategic dilemma of fighting a two-front war against NATO to the west and China on the east. If a rapprochement with the PRC was successful, not only would the USSR's "rear" be secure in the event of a European conflict, but in the absence of a threat from China, forces allocated to the Far East would be available for commitment, perhaps decisively, in the west. Precedent had been established in late 1941 when the Soviets, after determining that Japan was not going to attack, transferred eighteen divisions with 1700 tanks to the west to counter the German invasion.¹⁹

While argument could be made that regardless of the status of the Sino-Soviet relationship, a sizeable Soviet presence in the Far East is necessary to check a possible United States maritime

strategy, such criticism would reflect an imperfect grasp of American intentions. This strategy proposes to horizontally escalate any regional U.S.-Soviet conflict as in Europe to other theaters of operation, attacking Soviet forces including ballistic missile submarines and the homeland itself.²⁰ To counter such thrusts the Soviet Air Force and Navy would play the principal roles. American ground forces and their requisite strategic lift are not sufficient to pose a serious threat, thereby permitting the Soviets to safely release ground units for action elsewhere.

There were substantial economic drivers motivating the Soviets as well. To man, train, and equip such a large force at such great distances required a considerable investment of resources. The level of resources required to support, in toto, the armed forces inherited by Gorbachev was even greater. The military establishment was exerting a tremendous drain on budget allocations, raw materials, human resources, and production capacity from the civilian sector at the same time the domestic economy was experiencing systemic collapse. The linkage was inescapable and Gorbachev correctly reasoned that such a levy could not be maintained if the economy was to be revitalized. His declaration of a new military doctrine embodying force levels of "reasonable sufficiency" reflected this conclusion, acknowledging the necessity of asymmetrical force reductions. While, admittedly, this action was directed towards the West, proportionate economic benefits would accrue if troops were cut in the Far East.

Lastly, the USSR had been concerned since 1971-72 about the Sino-United States relationship developing into an anti-Soviet alliance of varying degree. The subsequent emergence of Japan as a regional power, coupled with its close ties to the United States and tentative contacts with the PRC, generated fears of a three party coalition with objectives inimical to Soviet interests. According to one authoritative source, "the Soviet military build-up pushed both China and Japan towards increased cooperation with the United States on Asian security issues."²¹ By mending fences with China, the Soviets hoped to drive a wedge into the coalition or at least forestall any evolution, while concurrently remaining positioned to participate in Pacific regional affairs and trade.²²

As with the Soviet Union, it was also in China's interest to proceed towards a new relationship with its rival. Whereas China formerly regarded the Soviet Union as an unrestrained security threat and welcomed the United States as a counterweight, by the late 1980s the USSR had turned inward, beset with serious economic challenges, and had abandoned its confrontational style of foreign policy. Moreover, China had increased its nuclear arsenal, to include submarine launched ballistic missiles, to the point where although it could not claim superpower status, it had attained sufficient capability to hurt the USSR in the event of conflict. This deterrent capability effectively nullified the Soviet option of "nuclear blackmail" employed to advantage during the 1969 border crisis, and gave the Chinese renewed conviction in their ability to defend themselves without the protection of the United States'

umbrella. With this confidence, the Chinese now had the impetus to put a fresh twist on their foreign policy, giving it an independent bent. By appearing receptive to Moscow they aimed to enhance their leverage and potential gain as they were courted by Washington in turn, and vice versa.

This shift towards a centrist approach has another stimulus. Whereas the "China card" was once an attractive strategic gambit for the two superpowers, its value is now diminishing. China senses this and welcomes closer ties with the Soviet Union to protect its interests and to ensure its place as a principal actor in a multipolar world.²³

Finally, China's leaders realized that conciliation complemented their vision for their country in the 21st century. In 1978 China initiated a program known as the "Four Modernizations" whose goal was to transform China into an industrially advanced nation and militarily powerful state by the year 2000. To achieve this, four areas were to be emphasized: science and technology, industry, agriculture, and the military.²⁴ The plan proceeded, but by 1985 the Chinese recognized that their economy was stressed and, like the Soviets, their military establishment was costly. Although the armed forces ranked last in relative order among the "Four Modernizations," its reorganization became "one of the higher economic priorities because the entire course of restructuring in the country depend[ed], in no small degree, on its successful realization."²⁵ Accordingly, in June, 1985, the Central Military Affairs Committee, chaired by Deng

Xiaoping, announced intentions to cut the military by one million men.²⁶ The goal was achieved by 1988, and in that same year the military portion of the state's budget stood at 8.2 percent, down from 17.7 percent in 1977.²⁷ If a distinct level of tension was to be maintained with the Soviets, such troop reductions would be harder to justify, putting at risk the increased economic benefit.

While the rationale for rapprochement was clearly in the national interests of both countries, until recently China's "three obstacles" remained. Although both Andropov and Chernenko attempted gestures regarding trade agreements and official visits, it was not until Gorbachev that the pace accelerated, particularly after his Vladivostok speech. In October, 1986, Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Rogachev arrived in Beijing for discussions that eventually led to a pledge to resume border negotiations. In spring of the following year, the USSR reduced its troop strength in Mongolia by one motorized rifle division. The signing of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force (INF) Treaty by the United States and the Soviet Union in December, 1987, produced an important side effect which contributed to the lowering of tension with China. Under the terms of the treaty, not only were missiles in Western Europe affected, but the Soviets also agreed to destroy over three hundred medium and short range missiles stationed in the East.²⁸ Significantly, spring 1988 witnessed the beginning of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and a signal from Rogachev to Hanoi suggesting that it imitate that Soviet action in Kampuchea.²⁹

December, 1988, saw the nascence of the Sino-Soviet military rapprochement. Vietnam had completed removal of 50,000 troops from Kampuchea, an agreement was reached regarding the formation of a "military and diplomatic experts group" to determine ways to reduce the military forces on each other's border, Minister of Foreign Affairs Qian Qichen visited the Soviet Union, the third round of border talks was held in Moscow, and preparations for a summit meeting between Mikhail Gorbachev and Deng Xiaoping were well underway.³⁰

In February, 1989, Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, amplifying a commitment made by Gorbachev at the United Nations the previous December, announced that the Soviets would reduce their forces in the eastern portion of the country by 200,000 men, withdraw three-quarters of their forces in Mongolia, and restructure units near the Chinese border so as to assume a more defensive role. He also indicated that the Soviet Union had suggested additional topics for discussion of a confidence and security building nature, such as the reduction of offensive elements in the armed forces and limitations on the number and scale of military exercises.³¹ To all concerned the "three obstacles" had in essence been overcome.

However, in March, 1989, the Chinese expressed a cautionary note. While optimistic about the normalization process and the possibilities of an upcoming summit, Qian Qichen, perhaps still somewhat wary of the Soviets, indicated that additional progress was required on the removal of the "three obstacles." Although the

Chinese were satisfied with the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, the border issue remained unsolved, and it was disturbing that the Vietnamese were apparently procrastinating regarding Cambodia.³²

These items were not enough to derail the summit as it was conducted as scheduled from 15-18 May, 1989. Although marred by the demonstrations in Tiananmen Square, the summit's final joint communique stressed the establishment of a new relationship between the Soviet Union and China and renounced any form of hegemonic goals in the Pacific region. The summit was remarkable not so much for what was accomplished, but for the symbolic effect of ending thirty years of estrangement.³³

During his visit, Gorbachev did announce that Soviet forces deployed along the Far East border would be cut by 120,000 men, and that twelve army divisions and eleven air force regiments would be disbanded while sixteen warships would be withdrawn from the Pacific Fleet. The remaining forces would be reorganized with some formations assuming a defensive orientation as "machine gun" divisions.³⁴ In late May, 1989, the Soviets announced that as additional confidence building measures, observers would be invited to monitor the naval paredown referenced by Gorbachev and that the number of military exercises in the Far East would be reduced.³⁵

Additional indications of a military rapprochement unfolded in November, 1989, when the commander of the Transbaykal Military District indicated that coordination and cooperation between border defense units of the two countries had become more productive. During that same month Soviet and Chinese military and diplomatic

officials met in Moscow to discuss a reduction of armed forces on both sides of the border and the issue of enhancing mutual trust in the military sphere.³⁶ This led in April, 1990, a month short of the summit's anniversary, to an "agreement on the guiding principles for a mutual reduction in armed forces and confidence building in the military sphere in the Soviet-Chinese border area," signed during the visit of Chinese Premier Li Peng to Moscow.³⁷

During June, 1990, a follow-on meeting was held in Beijing to discuss the implementation of the measures contained in the agreement. While there, the surface fleet naval academy at Dalian was toured.³⁸ Similar meetings were conducted in Moscow in September during which time talks centered on which units and types of weapons systems should be reduced, exchanges of information concerning these units and weapons, and measures of verification for confidence building. Interestingly, the Chinese delegation was given the opportunity to visit selected troop units and military academies in Tashkent and Alma-Ata and meet with personnel of the staff department of the Turkmen Military Region so as to further the confidence building process.³⁹ That same year the Soviets sent a strong signal to Beijing that they were abandoning their policy of encirclement when a substantial portion of their normal complement of bomber and fighter aircraft departed Cam Ranh Bay in Viet-Nam without replacement.⁴⁰

Simultaneously, negotiations were proceeding in related directions. In September, 1989, it was revealed that military representatives were discussing the establishment of a

demilitarized zone along the border.⁴¹ Movement on the border issue itself occurred during successive rounds of talks as seen by the Soviet willingness to return Zhenbao Island. Heixiazi remained in dispute.⁴²

Military-to-military contacts were spreading through each side's armed forces in the form of official observances, greetings, and visits. Prior to December, 1988, such contacts were usually at a low level. In April, 1988, Chinese Army officers laid wreaths in Jilin province at a monument to fallen soldiers of the Soviet Red Army.⁴³ July saw a delegation from Soviet border army units participate in a celebration sponsored by the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) in Mohe county commemorating the 61st anniversary of the PLA.⁴⁴ After December, 1988, however, the 62nd anniversary was noted by USSR Defense Minister Dmitriy Yazov in a message to his opposite number in the PRC, Colonel General Qin Jiwei, while in November, 1989, the USSR Defense Council congratulated Jiang Zemin on his elevation as chairman of the Communist Party of China Central Committee Military Commission.⁴⁵

This led to an initiation of military exchanges the following year, ending an approximately thirty year hiatus. In April, members of China's National Defense Ministry headed by Major General Song Wenzhong visited selected Soviet military installations. Significantly, they were met by then Colonel General Mikhail Moiseyev, Chief of the USSR Armed Forces General Staff.⁴⁶ During that same month Moiseyev met with Xu Xin, Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the PLA, who had accompanied Premier Li Peng on

his visit to Moscow.⁴⁷ Following Xu Xin's visit, the Soviets and Chinese traded military delegations in June. Colonel General Liu Huaqing, Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission, was accompanied by ranking officials in research and development who discussed military technology exchanges, while talks with Defense Minister Yazov, General Moiseyev, Air Force commander-in-chief A. N. Yefimov, and Army General V. M. Shabanov focused on expanding contacts among members of their respective armed forces.⁴⁸ The following day, Moiseyev indicated his receptiveness to long-term cooperation in military technology and stated that "his country and China would now be building their military relations on a new basis," adding, "agreement had been reached on the principles for establishing military economic relations."⁴⁹ One source defined the phrase "military economic relations" as possibly ranging from arms sales to co-production of weapons systems.⁵⁰

Coincidental with Huaqing's visit, Soviet Rear Admiral Vladimir Khuzhokov, representing the Ministry of Defense, travelled to China where he met General Chi Haotian, Chief of the General Staff of the PLA, and Xu Xin. Both sides expressed the hope that relations between the two armed forces would continue to progress. Prior to departing Moscow, Khuzhokov had hinted at possible future developments to include port calls, exchanges of military academy cadets, and visits by military journalists and sportsmen.⁵¹

During the same month Deputy Foreign Minister Rogachev and Foreign Minister Qian Qichen also met, and from the change in rhetoric it became apparent that the Cambodian question, while

still requiring resolution, had been down-graded in significance and was no longer a major stumbling block.⁵² Clearly, the frequency of contacts was mounting.

Miscellaneous events occurred over the summer and fall with Xu Xin greeting a group of Soviet veterans in July in Beijing, and Yazov continuing the tradition of congratulating his counterpart on the anniversary of the PLA in August.⁵³ In what might have been a striking step in the two countries' military rapprochement, Yazov was scheduled to fly to China in mid-August to discuss a possible agreement whereby the Soviets would provide advanced military technology in return for consumer goods from China, but the trip was evidently delayed by the Iraq-Kuwait crisis.⁵⁴

A Chinese military group arrived in Mongolia in September for the first time since 1961, while a logistics delegation from the PLA travelled to Moscow in October to visit colleges, army units, and research facilities as well as to receive briefings on logistics topics from the Soviet army.⁵⁵ The following month Major General E. Nechayev, head of the Soviet Army's Military Medical Department, and accompanying medical officers met General Cho Nam Qi, member of the Central Military Commission and director of the PLA's General Logistics Department in Beijing.⁵⁶

China's interest in logistics matters may be in response to an October, 1989 comment by Vice Admiral Zhang Xusan, Deputy Commander of the Chinese Navy, in which he characterized the Navy as a branch of the PLA and announced the Navy's intention to build a "comprehensive and modern logistics system."⁵⁷ Whether this

statement and the subsequent visits by the logistics delegation and General Nechayev are related remains speculative, but the Chinese are expressing a growing interest in Soviet military systems.

As early as September, 1988, a member of the Chinese delegation to Britain's state-of-the-art Farnborough Airshow stated that China was seeking to buy Soviet missiles.⁵⁸ In March, 1989, the Kamov Design Bureau participated in an international exhibition of helicopters and light aircraft in Beijing.⁵⁹ By 1990 Chinese interest in Soviet weapons and technology had accelerated, perhaps propelled by the sanctions the West had imposed after the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989. Three months following General Moiseyev's comment regarding a new basis for military relations, the "Far Eastern Economic Review" revealed in September, 1990, that Chinese and Soviet military officials were negotiating the purchase of a dozen Su-24 "Fencer" ground attack aircraft.⁶⁰ One month later, consultations were said to be in the preliminary stages for the acquisition of an unknown number of Su-27 "Flanker" fighter aircraft by the Chinese Air Force.⁶¹ The Chinese were also pursuing advanced radar technology for their F-8 fighters, and have invited Soviet specialists to inspect an aircraft engine factory to determine what assistance can be provided.⁶²

A final area, the development of lines of communication and supporting infrastructure, while primarily civilian in nature, possesses clear military applications and highlights the extent of the rapprochement. Improvement of transportation links will certainly bring economic benefits, but it is also relevant to

Soviet military doctrine which requires theaters of war to be adequately prepared from an operational, rear services (logistics), and engineer standpoint. A salient feature of this preparation is to ensure that the gauges of railroad track are compatible.⁶³

From this perspective, the proliferation of railroad links between the Soviet Union and China is interesting. Such activity would not be prudent if tension and suspicion remained high. As early as December, 1988, construction of a railroad from Kazakhstan to China was under consideration.⁶⁴ It materialized in July, 1989, when an agreement was reached to link both countries' railroad networks in a westerly direction and service the border region. This railroad would complete the segment from Urumqi in Xinjiang to the border at Alatau Shankou, where it would connect with an existing Soviet line to form the shortest land route from Western Europe to the Asia-Pacific region. Since Soviet and Chinese railroad gauges are different, facilities to change train wheels would also be built.⁶⁵ Completed in September, 1990, this railroad effectively joins the Pacific Ocean in Lianyungang, China, with the Atlantic Ocean at Rotterdam, the Netherlands. It is the second transcontinental link in Eurasia, the first being the Trans-Siberian Railway.⁶⁶

Other transportation systems are becoming interwoven as well. During July and September, 1989, air service was inaugurated between Urumqi and Alma-Ata and between Harbin and Khabarovsk, respectively.⁶⁷ By November, 1990, an agreement was reached for a new route between Irkutsk and Shenyang, and flights between

Leningrad and Beijing had been proposed.⁶⁸

In mid-1990, two ports, one in Heilongjiang province and the other in Jilin province were opened to the Soviet Union, adding to six Soviet and Chinese ports opened previously in July, 1989.⁶⁹ Agreement was reached in November, 1990, to construct a bridge over the Amur river, and during the March, 1990, announcement of a new highway linking Soviet Pogradichnyy with Suifenhe in Heilongjiang province the accompanying video showed military personnel shaking hands.⁷⁰

It appears from a number of perspectives that the process of military rapprochement gradually accelerated during 1990. Assuming a continued progression, what implications exist for the United States?

Initially, there should be no apprehensions regarding the resurrection of a military alliance between the two countries similar to that which existed in the 1950s. China desires to maintain an independent track, neither obligated to nor under the wing of anyone, and has made this clear on repeated occasions.⁷¹ Concomitantly, the United States can no longer rely on China as a viable counterweight to Soviet involvement in the Asia-Pacific rim. Likewise, the threat of China as a source of a second front in the event of conflict between the USSR and the United States is now questionable, although German reunification, the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) agreement, and the collapse of the Warsaw Pact render that point somewhat moot.

Increasingly, the Chinese may turn to the Soviets for modern armaments, particularly aircraft and avionics. The United States had established a foothold in this area, negotiating a five hundred fifty million dollar contract whereby the Grumman Corporation would upgrade the electronics, navigation equipment, and radar onboard the Chinese F-8 fighter under a project entitled "Peace Pearl."⁷² However, the Chinese cancelled the transaction after the West imposed sanctions on weapons sales following the Tiananmen massacre, thereby removing a potential source of leverage for the United States in the form of technical advice and spare parts.⁷³ As sanctions are lifted, China will undoubtedly "continue to obtain technology...from both the Soviet Union and the United States and it will seek to extract from each superpower the maximum possible advantage."⁷⁴ The Soviets may be the preferred source if payment can be effected through a barter arrangement due to each country's shortage of hard currency.

The United States can expect the military rapprochement to continue, but not at a precipitous pace. China will proceed tentatively, still retaining a residual mistrust of the USSR, while any dramatic move on the part of the Soviets should not be expected until their internal economic and political strife are resolved. Regardless, progress in this direction will be considered as an imperative by both. Continued movement on the border issue, initiation of port calls, and exchanges of officers should be anticipated as should additional confidence building measures such as those suggested by Mikhail Titarenko:

--notification in advance of all exercises of land forces that

involve over 13,000 people;

- advance notification of movements, transfer and concentration of troops above established minimum parameters;
- exchange of annual plans of military activities that are subject to notification;
- invitation of observers of the countries concerned to all exercises, movements or transfers of armed forces that exceed the established numerical minimum;
- development of necessary measures of inspection and control.¹⁵

It must be understood that military rapprochement is only part of a broader process of normalized relations, one of the prizes of which is economic advantage in the Asia-Pacific Rim. The major players are now Japan and the United States, but normalization will permit China to increasingly devote her attention to this area. The USSR, offering the oil, mineral, and hydro-electric resources of the Siberian interior and utilizing the Soviet-Chinese rail and transportation network as a conduit to market, can assert itself as well.

For the United States, Japan may well prove to be the linchpin. Will she accept closer ties with these countries at the expense of America? More intriguingly, will she shift towards a USSR that is assuming the appearance of a more benign, non-threatening nation? Such an approach by the Soviets may motivate Japan to discount its requirement for security guarantees from the United States, prompting a more independent course particularly if economic tension between the two Western powers persists.

The major impediment to a warmer Japan-Soviet relationship continues to be the Northern Territories--four islands in the Southern Kurile chain north of Hokkaido seized by the Soviets at the end of World War II. Japan has demanded their return which the Soviets have refused. Were the Soviets, citing force reductions in Europe and along the Chinese border as precedent, to offer to withdraw from the Kuriles and acknowledge Japanese sovereignty in return for an American withdrawal from Japanese territory, it might prove too powerful a temptation to resist. If the ploy were successful, an enormous amount of Japanese goodwill would accrue to the Soviets while simultaneously the removal of American forces would be a powerful check to the United States' policy of forward deployment. The loss of tactical and logistic support bases in Japan, coupled with the rather tenuous nature of comparable facilities in the Philippines, could lead the United States to rely on bases in Guam and in the Marianas to maintain a forward presence--a strategic coup for the Soviets. The resulting power vacuum and accompanying instability in the Asia-Pacific region would be seen by both the USSR and the PRC as an opportunity to expand their influence.

Regardless of whether the Soviets present such an offer, the United States should encourage Japan to serve as a counter to both the USSR and China. This will cause a true multi-polar structure to evolve in the region vice the current triangular (United States, Soviet Union, China) one. Were corresponding assistance provided to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations organization,

intensified economic competition and even greater stability might result.

Until such developments occur, Washington's interaction with the USSR and China will be much more balanced. "The more mature Sino-Soviet relationship...has become less amenable to manipulation than ever before."⁷⁷ It will no longer be as easy from a global perspective for the United States to play the "China card."

Finally, the United States must proceed cautiously in the wake of Soviet military reductions in the Far East, remaining alert to Soviet attempts to seek corresponding cuts in American strength, especially naval, in the Pacific. Efforts to cite parallels to the CFE agreement in Europe would be fallacious since those negotiations dealt with opposing land-based forces with similar missions. In the Pacific, the United States relies on its maritime superiority to check the Soviets' continental power. While the Pacific Fleet is the Soviets' largest, its mission, protection of nuclear ballistic missile submarines and the seaward approaches to the USSR, is essentially sea denial in contrast to the American Seventh Fleet's role of power projection. The Soviet army and air forces in the Far East, aside from the SS-20s, never posed much of a threat to the United States, and their naval decrements fell on the older, less capable vessels. These "reductions" must therefore be viewed as possessing more of a perceptual vice substantial impact, and United States' policy should be governed accordingly.⁷⁸

These implications portend great challenges. From an openly hostile climate in the 1960s complete with armed clashes,

Gorbachev's strategic vision has resulted in a new beginning with the People's Republic of China. What started as a limited dialogue involving border negotiations has led to a military rapprochement between the USSR and China involving increased contact among senior leaders and the two countries' armed forces, discussions on confidence building measures, potential arms sales, and an improved regional logistics and/or transportation network. By pursuing a less confrontational foreign policy and by making significant concessions regarding China's "three major obstacles," Gorbachev has been able to create a relationship that has simultaneously mitigated the threat to the Soviet Far East and positioned the USSR for a favorable role in the economic development of the Pacific Rim. The military rapprochement is a harbinger of heightened Soviet interest in the Asia-Pacific area and the United States must anticipate Soviet initiatives in the region that could have national security implications.

The United States has now reached the end of an era. This requires that Washington assume a more sophisticated approach when dealing with issues involving the Soviet Union and China. Although a formal coalition between the latter two powers will not materialize, there is every expectation that the military rapprochement is ongoing and will continue.

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